

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
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Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: Dec. 16-18, 2009
Catahoula Lake: Dec. 10, 009
NW LA: Dec. 9, NE LA: Dec. 10-11

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	105,000	3,000	1,000	109,000
MOTTLED	50,000	53,000		103,000
GADWALL	369,000	287,000	**	656,000
WIGEON	22,000	9,000	**	31,000
GW TEAL	352,000	52,000		404,000
BW TEAL	116,000	30,000		146,000
SHOVELER	135,000	6,000		141,000
PINTAIL	296,000	9,000	3,000	308,000
TOTAL DABBLERS	1,445,000	449,000	4,000	1,898,000
SCAUP	18,000	54,000	2,000	74,000
RINGNECKED	72,000	51,000	24,000	147,000
CANVASBACK	1,000	1,000	39,000	41,000
TOTAL DIVERS	91,000	106,000	65,000	262,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,536,000	555,000	69,000	2,160,000
COOTS	478,000	623,000	2,000	1,103,000

**Less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 2.16 million ducks on this survey is 60% higher than the 1.34 million estimated in November, is similar to the 5-year average (2.29 million), and is about 25% lower than the long-term average (2.90 million). A survey was not completed in December 2008, but this estimate is similar to the 2.00 million estimated in 2007. Except for blue-winged teal, which declined from a record November high of 598,000 to 146,000 this month, all species increased markedly from

November. The cold air and sub-freezing temperatures in more northern Mississippi Flyway states during the first 2 weeks of December clearly created conditions conducive to moving more ducks into Louisiana. Still, gadwall, wigeon, green-winged teal, and pintails were below their long-term December averages, and the estimated number of mallards is about one-third that long-term benchmark. Conversely, despite the substantial decline from November, blue-winged teal remained 23% over the long-term December average, and shovelers, scaup, ringnecks, and canvasbacks were at or slightly above their long-term average for this month. Lastly, a surprisingly large increase in mottled ducks was seen in December (103,000 vs 70,000 in November). This was due to over twice as many birds counted in southeast Louisiana, primarily in the area around Delacroix, where many flocks of 10-25 mottled ducks were encountered. The reasons for that are unknown.

The distribution of ducks in coastal Louisiana continues to be strongly skewed toward the west with 73% counted on the southwestern transects. However, that was less than the 87% in November. The decline in bluewings was predominantly from southwest transects, and the increase in gadwalls was predominantly on the southeast transects, reducing the skewing, but the largest numbers continue to come from southwest Louisiana where very large amounts of shallow-flooded agricultural habitats are attracting concentrations of ducks. Big flocks of pintail and teal were seen in the flooded ag fields north of Cameron Prairie and Lacassine NWRs and northwest of Grand Lake, and concentrations of gadwalls were seen in the fresh marshes between Calcasieu Lake and White Lake. Although Catahoula Lake had far more ducks than in November, water levels remain high and the numbers of ducks were much lower than in December 2005 (178,000), 2006 (206,000), and 2007 (142,000), but higher than the 46,000 and 23,000 seen in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

Another 179,000 ducks and 148,000 geese (85% snow, 15% white-fronted) were counted in selected habitats of northeast Louisiana. That is a 45% increase in the number of ducks and 3 times the number of geese seen in November. This is the first time since 2005, when 120,000 ducks and 238,000 geese were counted, that a northeast Louisiana survey was completed in December, so no recent comparisons statements can be made. Pintails, mallards, and gadwalls were the most common species, and the largest concentrations were seen around Bonita, Mer Rouge, north of Bunkie, and at Saline and Delta Farms east of Catahoula Lake.

An additional 14,000 ducks were counted in northwest Louisiana, primarily on the locks, lakes, oxbows, and fields along the Red River upper Toledo Bend reservoir. This is substantially more than the 5,250 counted during an abbreviated survey in November, but less than the 23,000 counted in 2005, the last time a survey of this area was completed in December. Over half of the birds seen on this survey were mallards, and most of those were counted on managed shallow impoundments near Loggy Bayou. Gadwalls and ring-necked ducks made up most of the remaining ducks.

In December, LDWF conducts a scaup survey on Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne. An estimated 7,000 scaup were seen on Lake Borgne and 270,000 on Lake Pontchartrain. That is the highest number of scaup seen in December since the record 1.2 million in 2006. Most were seen on the western side of Lake Pontchartrain but scaup were widely distributed on the lake and counted on all lines of the survey.

Continued rainfall in November and early December following record precipitation in October has maintained or even increased flooded habitat across most of Louisiana. Backwaters of riverine systems, forested wetlands and swamps are flooded in most locations. Agricultural fields and flooded pastures in southwest and northwest Louisiana are providing above-average shallow-flooded habitat, and flooding in similar habitats in central, and northeast Louisiana have increased from both rainfall and additional managed acreage flooded since the November survey. However, water levels in the coastal marshes are very high, probably too high to provide optimum conditions

for feeding waterfowl.